



May 10, 2021

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
1610 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Napolitano,

On behalf of the 1.7 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, we are pleased to support H.R. 721, the Mental Health Services for Students Act. As educators begin to return to school buildings, others continue to teach virtually, and still others do both, many are confronted with a stew of emotions among their students. Even in the best of circumstances, students and their families experience tragedy and loss as a matter of course, but the COVID-19 pandemic has multiplied and magnified these challenges. Your legislation will help ensure that students have access to mental health services, which can be the difference between life and death, given that suicide is the second-leading cause of death for youth ages 15-19.

The AFT is a strong and longtime supporter of the community school model, which provides wraparound services within the school building to students, their families and their neighbors. The Mental Health Services for Students Act fits into this model perfectly by allowing public schools to partner with local mental health professionals to establish on-site mental health services for students. This is a time when students are experiencing depression from COVID-19 isolation, anxiety about returning to school, bullying in multiple forms, and the stress of potential gun violence in and around schools, and too frequently law enforcement is called in to address students' mental health needs, often causing additional trauma. Now, more than ever, mental health services are crucial to both students' academic achievement and their healthy development into adulthood.

As with other forms of healthcare, too many students do not have access to mental health supports—indeed, 60 percent of adolescents with depression and 49 percent of children with a mental health disorder do not receive care. Educators try their best to assist students with all their needs, and the AFT has developed materials to support teachers in discussing death, grief and other related issues, but our members need professional support in addressing students' emotional and psychological needs. The Mental Health Services for Students Act provides this assistance.

I thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Randi Weingarten
President

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

American Federation
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

AFT Teachers
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Professionals

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

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